

Evaluation of Denise Demboski

for the period September 1, 2020 through August 31, 2021

Conducted by the five members of the Selectboard: Zachary Burns, Megan Birch-McMichael, Cortni Frecha, James Salvie and Ellen Sturgis (chair and editor of combined reviews).

Overall Summary

Denise is a great asset to the town and the leader we need to move us forward. During her short tenure, we have embarked on a path of improvements in technology and transparency, policy clarification and renewal in a more general sense. With many new staff following retirements, this is a moment to (re)define Stow, while still appreciating our past. Denise is not only incredibly competent, but she is also empathetic, a quality that cannot be taught, but is inherent and key to a high functioning municipal government. By listening to staff and suggesting best practices that she has developed and observed over many years in municipal government, she is creating an environment that thrives instead of just survives. Denise is an integral part of the Selectboard, and we will encourage her more active participation as we together develop workplans to move the Town forward. We look forward to seeing Denise continue to grow and move the Town forward, hopefully with less emphasis on covid coordination, and more focus on the town's long-term goals.

Her overall evaluation was 4.73 out of a possible 5.0. We couldn't be more satisfied with our new Town Administrator.

Below is a summary of comments made in each of the 10 categories. The numbers represent the average score of the 5-7 specifics listed within each category, taken from the five individual evaluations.

The ratings are as follows:

- 1 – Unsatisfactory
- 2 – Needs Improvement
- 3 – Satisfactory
- 4 – Good Performance
- 5 – Outstanding Performance

DECISION MAKING – The Town Administrator must have the ability to make sound decisions and solve difficult problems.

Denise hit the ground running, and decisions have consistently been well thought out. She has made several innovative and often cost saving changes; in particular, the proposal to hire an Assistant TA was critical but potentially controversial; she listened but convinced both the Selectboard and the Town that it was a needed addition. (4.77)

COMMUNICATION – The Town Administrator must be effective with the residents, staff, news media, and elected officials.

Denise has excelled at communicating news with the Town and beyond. Hiring a PR firm came as an unexpected proposal, but we have reaped the benefits. Her open-door policy has resulted in both staff and residents having broader access, which has increased confidence in town management overall. Denise has embraced the use of social media and the website to spread information, which we believe will continue to improve information flow both in and out of Town Building. (4.72)

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT – An effective policy maker must develop personal characteristics which are conducive to the smooth operation of the governing body and government.

Denise has taken on the Stow TA position with poise and confidence. She consistently presents herself well in meetings and other events, demonstrating her knowledge and understanding of the nuances of the topic at hand. We saw her in action at Town meeting, demonstrating to the residents how well she knew her material and clearly and concisely responded to all questions.

We are all in awe of her work ethic—she’s here early, stays late and is always on call. As a result, several of us are concerned about her work/life balance! We want to be sure (though she assures us otherwise) that she doesn’t “burn out”, and that she delegates when possible. (4.83)

PLANNING – In order for the government to be efficient and meet its future needs, decisions must be deliberate rather than reactionary. Planning is the instrument of deliberate action.

Given her first year, it was expected that she had to be largely reactive both to existing systems as well as to the pandemic. We have been impressed, however, with her ability to be immediately proactive in addressing several areas, such as communication, technology, and HR. Moving ahead promptly with the ATA was an example of seeing long term needs and knowing where action was needed on the short term. (4.71)

LEADERSHIP/SUPERVISION – The ability to guide the government forward and effectively supervise staff is crucial to growth and progress.

Denise has put her staff as a high priority as demonstrated by closing Town Building for their safety during COVID, as well as in seeing the immediate need to hire an Assistant Town Administrator with demonstrated HR skills, an area that has been lacking. As a board, we can't evaluate in any detail how staff see her as a supervisor, though based on a few specific cases, we have seen her demonstrate patience when initially skeptical, and action when it was clearly overdue. We have heard from several department heads their appreciation for regular "senior staff" meetings, which has resulted in far better communication across departments. She excels at guiding the government forward, as she demonstrates regularly the clarity of responsibilities and roles of different positions. (4.23)*

[* Several Selectboard members felt they didn't have enough information to evaluate her on most staff-related items in this category, resulting in a lower score than what would be reflected in evaluating her overall leadership; this section will need revision next year.]

UNDERSTANDS ROLE – The role and function of a Town Administrator is generally well defined in the Town Charter. Serious problems arise when an Administrator does not understand that role or exceeds his/her authority.

As mentioned above, Denise understands her role very clearly, that day-to-day operations are hers to lead, and this clarity helps all of us. She is able to keep the Board informed, while maintaining clear boundaries on decision making, what is hers and what is ours. She is deferential to town boards, but exerts unmistakable influence, largely because of her knowledge, experience, and style.

The Selectboard continues to struggle to create an effective oversight role for itself and would like Denise to speak up more, especially given her experience in other towns. (4.77)

TEAM PLAYER – Excellence in government requires teamwork. A good team member must constantly strive to cooperate with other members of the governing body.

Following up on her leadership style and skill, Denise is an excellent role model as team player. Based on our experience as a Selectboard, we can infer that she values and respects the views of her department head teams, but is still willing to take actions that may not be popular with everyone. (4.90)

CONDUCT AT MEETINGS – The success of a local government depends on the productivity of the meeting of the governing body.

Denise is always extremely well prepared for any meeting she attends and contributes in a concise and productive manner. All of us appreciate that Denise far from dominates our meetings and only adds perspective when needed. But we all noted that we'd welcome even more participation: both in providing context/background that not everyone is aware of as well as sharing her opinions. (4.91)

ETHICS – A responsible Town Administrator adheres to a set of standards which are above reproach, consistently upholds the public trust.

Denise has consistently demonstrated that she holds herself to the highest of ethical standards, transparency, and adherence to the law. (4.77)

PANDEMIC LEADERSHIP – A Town Administrator should demonstrate leadership, knowledge, and a willingness to adapt to unforeseen situations.

Denise immediately instituted protocols upon arrival and we feel the employees were kept as safe as possible as a result of her decision to close Town Building, even though some residents were displeased. She made the most of CARES Act money, monitored other opportunities to offset our expenses and worked behind the scenes to improve access to testing and vaccinations. There was some concern that the Town could have received more pro-active leadership from our regional Board of Health. (4.60)

[attach evaluation template for reference]